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SUBJECT: VILLAGERS AND MAOISTS DETAIN TRAIN IN JHARKHAND ON EVE OF  
PARLIAMENTARY POLLS

11. (SBU) On April 22, on the eve of the second phase of India's parliamentary polls, approximately 200 villagers and Maoists took control of the 627 UP Barkakana-Dihari-Mughalsarai train for four hours in the Latehar district in Jharkhand. None of the 300 passengers were injured or killed during the encounter and the media reported that the passengers were provided with food and treated well. The Latehar Superintendent of Police, Hemant Toppo, told PolFSN that villagers initiated the operation to protest the Central Reserve Police Force's killing of five villagers on April 14, whom the CRPF had alleged were suspected Maoists. According to Toppo, the villagers released the train only after the police agreed to launch a probe into the five deaths and, if warranted, provide compensation.

12. (SBU) Comment: While this appears to be an operation organized by villagers, the Maoists were quick to piggy-back on villager discontent and used the train incident to demonstrate their influence in the area and encourage voters to heed their call to boycott the elections. The ability of the villagers and Maoists to successfully detain the train and momentarily capture the domestic and even international media attention highlights the domestic law and order challenges facing the national and state governments in Maoist affected areas.

PAYNE